



The Phoenix
Press



Los Angeles
Calif.

MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

Los Angeles, Calif., Jan. 1, 1936

Dear Friend:

This month's letter is devoted to the problem of illumination, as understood in its mystical sense. The term illumination was first used by the early Christians to signify baptism by the spirit. In the Middle Ages a sect called the Illuminati sprang up and it is from the traditions of this order that the Illuminist doctrines of today have their origin. The principal doctrine of illuminism is that man can be wholly possessed by the light of truth. We may therefore create a metaphysical definition for illumination in the terms of mystical Christianity: When the grace of universal truth comes to any man and abides with him, that man is illumined.

It might seem from such a definition that the whole problem is a simple one, but unfortunately a number of extremely difficult factors present themselves. ~~In the first place illumination is a word, a~~ word representing a very abstract idea. Although the rules of language have been pretty well fixed in the last two hundred years, the meanings of obscure words or those pertaining to spiritual mysteries are still comparatively uncertain. We use words to communicate ideas but while the ideas of men are modified by innumerable shades of meaning, language, which is comparatively inflexible, is seldom a complete or adequate vehicle for the complete communication of thought. For this reason even carefully chosen words often convey an inadequate or even false impression. Especially is this true of the English tongue which has developed an

amazing industrial vocabulary but is weak indeed in transcendental terminology.

An even more disastrous equation is the weakness of man's interpretative power and his comparative ignorance of the actual meanings of the words and terms of his own language. The average vocabulary is only six hundred words of which most are of one or two syllables. Even these words are loosely used and inadequately interpreted. When difficult or obscure terms are used in speaking or writing, the average person must guess at their meanings and arrive at certain generalities by context, while fine points elude the uninformed until the values of meanings are hopelessly obscured.

The word illumination is peculiarly difficult. First, because of its fundamental inadequacy to signify the state which it is used to define; and second, because its metaphysical inference is entirely beyond the experience of those using the term. In modern metaphysics the word illumination is applied to the whole gamut of subjective reflexes from ecstasy to hysteria. Before we can hope to make any useful contribution to the literature bearing on the subject of illumination we must rescue the word itself from the present confusion of tongues and establish it as signifying a certain particular and specific state of human consciousness.

All rational men desire truth. The quest for enlightenment is co-eternal with the instinct to live.

The nobler impulses may be temporarily obscured by the material instincts but the nobler part of life finally reasserts itself, impelling humanity to essential progress. In this search for enlightenment man has formulated two major concepts of the nature and substance of truth. These we will now examine.

The ancient world postulated a universal consciousness distributed throughout creation, supporting and sustaining all things by virtue of its intrinsic perfection. The universe and all that it contains was produced by Absolute Truth, is maintained by Absolute Truth and is moved inevitably towards ends determined before the processes of creation had brought forth the world.

The modern concept is very different. The universe is regarded as alive but not conscious. Knowledge is looked upon as accumulative and to man is assigned the task of revealing truth by an infinite labor through incalculable periods of time. In other words, there is no knowledge until mind discovers it, and to the modest scientist, science itself is the regulator of minds and the custodian of all knowledge. It is inevitable that two such conflicting viewpoints would build about themselves equally divergent schools of thought. Philosophy, the mediator between all the extremes in nature, acknowledges a certain integrity in both viewpoints and combines both postulates in its program of human enlightenment.

Our modern civilization is keyed to the scientific notion that all knowledge arises from the desperate struggle of the mind to gather and reconcile the vast body of data which has accumulated through the centuries and now forms the body of learning. Education therefore consists of filling modern minds with the opinions of the ages. This same viewpoint has also come to largely dominate religion. Religious training consists largely of listening and agreeing. This explains why so little vitality remains in the theological systems of our day.

Various schools of mystical philosophy have formulated their own definitions or equivalents for the term illumination. To some the word signifies a complete absorption of the self into the impersonal essence of universal life. To others the term implies

awakening of the subjective self and its complete absorption of the individuality and purpose of the objective nature. If illumination has any meaning at all to us, it must signify an extension of all the rational virtues of the mind and soul. Enlightenment is superiority, not the assumed grandiloquence of the proverbial hornblower but an essential greatness marked by an appropriate modesty of attitude and action. Illumination is not bestowed, it is achieved.

There is no more ridiculous pretense in the whole sphere of pseudo-occultism than the promise of illumination held out to stupid people as a bait to swell the ranks of some worthless metaphysical cult. In the last fifteen years I have come across a considerable number of pseudo-illuminated metaphysical Pharisees suffering from one of the most objectionable forms of the superiority complex. As their problem is a common one, constantly recurring from year to year, it may be generally useful to examine it critically.

Having examined the pretenses of a number of persons of different cult affiliations who claim to enjoy a specific form of illumination, I find that their claims to special enlightenment may be for the most part classified under a few simple headings. Of course occasionally an entirely new type of fraud comes along but for the most part the shysters run true to form—seeming to lack originality along with the other virtues. To classify the exhibits:

- 1. An emotional person who takes "advanced" lessons from some occult teacher who claims to be a master, enjoys a neuro-psychic thrill at the thought of being so close to a "mahatma" and mistakes these "jitters" for a high degree of spiritual vibration. Romantic inhibitions and hero-worship are also factors in this form of illumination.*

- 2. At the present time there is an exceptionally choice assortment of cults and groups claiming to be the "one and only inspired source of perfect wisdom and complete understanding." It naturally follows that when some benighted mortal falls under the influence of such absurd pretenses he is almost certain to feel that he participates in a high and exclusive consciousness. The pleasant sense of these feelings often passes off as illumination.*

3. Then there is the special formula illuminate. He is the type who has paid over well for some metaphysical catch phrases and formulas which he uses as aids when going into the silence or as a means of producing auto-hypnosis. Such a person may have a few mild psychic experiences, or think that he has, so he rests upon his laurels and discusses illumination in a personal and authoritative sort of way.

4. Then of course there is the initiate-illuminate who has taken sixteen degrees in some utterly worthless secret society and is completely intoxicated by the realization of his own importance. He also has access to "esoteric documents" which have nothing of any importance in them and feels with all due modesty that he is entitled to regard himself as "almost" an adept. This type is often found sitting around waiting for cosmic consciousness, with the firm conviction that it will arrive at any moment.

5. The next type is the mis-information illuminate. His consciousness is completely overwhelmed by the "cosmic truths" which have been imparted to him by some metaphysical scallawag. He will tell you in the most awed sotto voce that only his prayers are preventing the next world war, or that if it were not for him and other contrite souls California would slip into the Pacific Ocean. He may also pass on to the privileged few the important spiritual fact that archangels always part their hair in the center.

6. Then, last but not least, there is the most stubborn and irrational of all the pseudo-illuminates—the personal experience illuminate. He sees things and has experiences, initiations and soul flights. Having no knowledge whatsoever of occult matters he is one of those poor souls who gets mediumship confused with mastery and writes books on cosmic consciousness.

Of course there are modifications and sub-varieties but these are the most common and most typical and account for nearly all of our so-called illuminates. The fact of the matter is that the average student of metaphysics has no concept whatsoever as to the nature of illumination and is therefore

in no position to protect himself against foolishness and chicanery.

It seems to me that one of the main causes of metaphysical misunderstandings is the time equation in personal development. While it is true that time itself has no spiritual existence, it is also true that while we live in the material world our activities are measured and circumscribed by the time factor. Impatience is an unphilosophic attitude, and in the task of perfecting oneself there is no successful way of hastening natural processes beyond a certain systematic endeavor. We should stop thinking of perfection as something just around the corner and admit the evident fact that at the present rate of progress it will be many lives before anything resembling perfection can be reasonably expected. To extend his spiritual powers a person must be prepared to devote an appropriate amount of time to his endeavors.

Take for example the average metaphysician. Up to middle life there was probably little if any interest in philosophy and self discipline. At about forty metaphysics was contacted. For the next ten years there was some reading, possibly attendance of lectures on assorted subjects by strangely assorted teachers. These ten years also brought many disillusionments and the total progress for the period could not be regarded as very intensive or consistent. But ten years seems a long time to the person totally unacquainted with cosmic immensities, and the mind begins to entertain thoughts of illumination, rewards and universal beneficence. These rewards, being totally out of proportion to the merit of action, do not manifest themselves and impatience grows where patience itself was never cultivated.

Once upon a time I met a dear old soul who for all practical purposes epitomizes an entire class of human beings. She had been in "new thought" for nineteen years, a period which to her mind was just a little short of infinity. She could not conceive that there could be any more to know, or any further accomplishment possible. She could quote fluently the platitudes of prominent metaphysicians, she had read all the books, attended all the lectures, and knew all the answers. Perfectly sincere, as far as stupidity can be sincere, she was settling back to

await the downpouring of cosmic consciousness. She fully believed she had earned illumination, and its failure to appear was a distinct miscarriage of divine justice.

The facts this kindly person did not realize are that art is long and that the human mind has not yet been formed that can possess all knowledge in itself. Illumination is not a matter of nineteen years or nine million years. It is a matter of the unfoldment of the inward self. It may require a thousand lives to release the soul powers from the entangling corruption of matter. Only a very few human beings have labored so intensely and achieved so fully in their previous lives that they can reasonably expect even a moderate degree of spiritual awareness in this present incarnation. Instead of worrying about cosmic consciousness, which after all is only a term signifying a spiritual state far beyond present probability, rather dedicate the present life to a program of intelligent and reasonable progress. It is not that we should die perfect but rather that we should die better than we were born. All real growth is gradual, gentle and sure. It is natural that we should all aspire to a divine estate, but reason dictates an intelligent preparation and a consistent program of action.

Our term illumination has much in common with the Buddhist term Nirvana, or the Absolute of Absolutism, or the cosmic consciousness of New Thought. No human being can accomplish these final ultimates and still remain a human being in contact with other mortals of this world. Individuality retires gradually towards infinities and is finally absorbed. The term illumination however has a slightly different inference in practice, from finalities; for example illumination is progressive. It is a constant, endless unfoldment.

I would like to establish a series of definitions and explanations which I hope every student of occultism will understand and make a part of his philosophy of life:

1. Illumination is man's conscious entry into the sphere of spiritual understanding. It is, so to speak, the soul's coming of age. In the physical life of man it corresponds to maturity. It is the condition of having outgrown the material illusions

which dominate the infancy and childhood of life. As it is impossible for the child to gain the experiences of life except by growing through its several ages, so it is impossible for consciousness to be released into maturity of expression without passing gradually through the educative disciplines imposed upon it by natural law.

2. Illumination can come only to those who have merited it by many lives lived in absolute dedication to the cause of truth. Illumination is not primarily dominated by the factors of this present incarnation. It belongs to the great life cycle of the spirit and not to the small cycle of personality of which the present birth and death are the boundaries. Illumination is the most important spiritual fact in our cycle of existence, but it does not necessarily occur in this life or the next. It occurs when merit determines.

3. Illumination is only possible to those who have already highly refined and perfected every aspect of life and action. This refinement, the result of many lives, is revealed in the temperance of the nature in the present life. Uncontrolled emotions, destructive actions and perverse thoughts cannot exist in a highly evolved person. No individual who is incapable of controlling his own destructive tendencies can hope for any form of illumination until these evil tendencies have been mastered.

4. Illumination is an intensely internal experience arising from the chemistry of merit. Like initiation, illumination is an alchemical mystery. It is part of the Rosicrucian mystery of the transmutation of metals. It is called tincturing. It is the light of the soul shining outward through the body and transmuting every particle of the material nature with the power of beauty, virtue and wisdom.

5. Illumination can come only to the most highly advanced types of human beings. It is not to be found among inferior types because they are incapable of releasing spiritual powers through poorly organized bodies. Such illuminated human beings as Pythagoras and Plato possessed highly refined organisms, the result of many incarnations devoted to sublimating material principles. Such refinement of organism is absolutely indispensable to any high degree of spiritual progress.

6. Illumination never comes to a person incapable of understanding it or appreciating its significance. It is not unusual for people to go to a teacher of the occult sciences to have their psychic experiences diagnosed and interpreted. One will say, "such and such a thing happened to me—was it initiation?" Another will say, "I saw some funny lights last night—am I illuminated?" It is a rule that all can depend upon that no one will be illuminated or initiated without knowing it. The reason is very evident—no one can be initiated until he has reached a state of development in which he is perfectly qualified to decide for himself the significance of his mystical experiences. A person who does not know whether he is illuminated or not very evidently is not, for illumination itself could scarcely fail to clarify this problem for him.

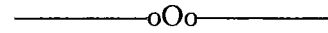
7. Illumination is never bestowed upon groups or orders nor at any specified time or place by rituals, formulas, lessons or esoteric revelations. One of the reasons why it is never bestowed upon groups is because there is no recorded incident where a number of people ever merited it at the same time or under the same conditions. In fact but one or two persons in a generation achieve it. All pretenses to the effect that illumination is communicable are in themselves fraudulent for not only is it an individual experience but there is no language known to man by which the consciousness of illumination could be transmitted from one to another.

8. Illumination, or anything like it, can never be promised by anyone. No person who would promise that he could bestow illumination is worthy to possess it and any person expecting another to illuminate him shows by his own ignorance that he is unworthy to receive such a boon. In all the ancient Wisdom Teachings disciplines prepare disciples for spiritual awakening but the awakening itself is a divine chemistry entirely beyond human control and regulated by the law of Karma.

9. Illumination is not a substitute for virtue, effort or discipline, but rather it is the reward for high accomplishment in all these virtues. These kindly folk who believe that spiritual realization will relieve them of all their earthly responsibilities have too much of theology and not enough of philosophy

in their souls. Theology teaches man to cast his burdens on others but philosophy to carry them himself. Illumination is not the beginning of occultism, but the end of it. Few seek wisdom for its own sake, the most desire it only as a solution to the discomforts of life. While wisdom certainly releases man from bondage to trivial annoyances, it also bestows upon him a larger responsibility than he ever knew.

10. Illumination does not cleanse men of the evils of their own natures but rather comes only to those who have already cleansed themselves by the disciplines of philosophy. There are thousands of metaphysicians who believe that when they get the mystic formula of peace, power and plenty all their evil dispositions will be cleansed in the twinkling of an eye. The truth of the matter is that their spiritual extensions of consciousness will never arrive until the life itself has been put in order. As the old philosophers have told us, if we desire the spirit of God to come and dwell with us we must cleanse the temple of all unworthiness and rededicate it to the principles of truth and justice.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION—To what degree is a university education useful to a person interested in the perfecting of his inner spiritual life?

ANSWER—The answer to this question must be understood to be an entirely individual matter. To some higher educational opportunity is of the greatest importance, whereas to others it is comparatively meaningless. Education does not insure spiritual superiority, that is the type of education to be secured from our colleges. On the other hand education can bestow capacity and appreciation, and, all other things being equal, may be an aid to the appreciation of metaphysical values. The ancients regarded education as a prerequisite to philosophy. Pythagoras would accept no disciples who had not achieved scholastic honors; and Plato caused a panel to be placed over the gate of his school on which were the words: "Let no man ignorant of geometry enter here." The value of so-called higher education depends upon the motive which moves the stu-

dent to learning and also the mental capacity of the student himself. Of course youth is without the experience necessary for the higher appreciation of educational opportunity and very few college students are moved to their studies by any great spiritual aspiration. It is only years afterwards when most of the schooling has been forgotten that the mature person begins to wish that he had been more attentive in his periods of learning.

One of the greatest students of comparative religion and philosophy in the modern world was deprived by poverty of the benefits of a university education. General Albert Pike, soldier, scholar, philosopher and Freemason, was turned from the house of learning because he could not pay the matriculation fee. Thus denied, he educated himself and became one of the greatest scholars of the modern world. In his advancing years the university which had refused him admission offered General Pike an honorary degree. Pike declined, saying that when he had needed the university it had refused him and that he now had no use for its honors. After his sixtieth year General Pike mastered the Hebrew language, also the Persian tongue, and Sanskrit, and translated the sacred scriptures of the Jews, Persians and Hindus, with numerous important commentaries.

Education is necessary to philosophy but education is not always to be secured from those institutions presumably dedicated to its promulgation. The shallowness of our present educational theory means usually dubious returns for the years spent in the modern college.

QUESTION—Do you believe that we are about to enter the Golden Age?

ANSWER—In the mythology of the Greeks the life of the earth is divided into four great periods, called Ages. The first was the Golden Age, the second the Age of Silver, the third the Bronze Age, and the fourth the Age of Iron. These ages correspond with the Yugas of the Hindus which also divide the cycles of evolution into quaternary periods. The Golden Age of the Greeks is described by the poets as a time in which no evil existed, and all nature

dwelt together in beauty and harmony. Neither sin nor death had come into the world and Pandora's box with all its ills had never been opened to loose its misfortunes upon man. For thousands of years the idealists of the race have dreamed of the return of the Golden Age. They have envisioned man growing wiser and less selfish, evil ceasing and humanity restored at last to an enlightened and cooperative condition.

There is no evidence however at the present time that we are in any imminent danger of a general reform. Men grow more selfish with each passing day and we must experience much more of sorrow and suffering before we will voluntarily dedicate ourselves to a program of enlightenment. We now live in the Age of Iron or the Kali-yuga or Black Age of the Hindus. Until this cycle ends, and alas many thousands of years remain yet to run, we cannot look for the return of the Paradisaical state described in the ancient fables. Yet the Golden Age must finally come again, for all the progress of the race—though slow and apparently uncertain—is leading inevitably to a better day when humanity, tired of self-inflicted woes, will depart from their present course of evil and bring to reality the Utopias of their dreams.

QUESTION—What is the Trinity?

ANSWER—Nearly all of the great religious systems of the world represent their supreme Deity as manifesting through a Trinity or triad of attributes. The origin of the doctrine of the trinity is too remote to permit of discovery and analysis; but the belief that universal energy manifests triadically appears to be justified by the findings of modern science. Deity was frequently symbolized by the ancients as an equilateral triangle. Pythagoras represented divinity under the form of a triangle of dots to signify the divine power and its extensions or manifestations. In India the trinity consists of the creative, preservative and disintegrative aspects of universal life. These powers are represented by three human faces united in one head, as in the Trimurti of Elephanta, this composite figure representing the triple mystery of the Godhead. In Christianity the Father,

Son and Holy Ghost are the three persons of the Trinity or triform-unity. The three divine powers emanate from themselves the three worlds or planes of existence, termed heaven, earth and hell in Christian theology, or in the terms of Platonic philosophy the spiritual, intellectual and material creation. In the old Mysteries the three powers of the creative triad are called will, wisdom and action, or consciousness, intelligence and force. These powers are sometimes represented as three pillars or columns, as in the case of the Kabbalah. These pillars are referred to as the triple foundation of the world and represent the three forms of universal energy by which the equilibrium of creation is preserved.

QUESTION—Have we entered the Aquarian Age yet?

ANSWER—There is some difficulty in determining astronomically the actual time of the Sun's ingress into a zodiacal sign. Certain arbitrary factors must be accepted before any satisfactory calculation is possible. According to the opinions of modern astronomers the Sun is now in about the 8th degree of Pisces, and therefore has about 8 degrees yet to retire before it retrogrades by the precessional motion out of the sign and into Aquarius. The precessional motion is about 1 degree in 72 years. According to this calculation it will be nearly 600 years before the Sun actually enters the sign of Aquarius at the Equinox and the Aquarian Age has its beginning. Of course the Sun changes degree every 72 years and these degree changes are in themselves capable of producing a considerable change in the life of man. I know that several metaphysical movements are of the opinion that we have already entered the Aquarian Age or will very soon do so, but I do not believe that these organizations can justify their opinions astronomically.

QUESTION—Some time ago I went to an Evangelistic meeting and during the service there were people who took the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They became hysterical and rolled on the floor for over an hour. They were supposed to be under the

power of God. I would like to know your opinion regarding this?

ANSWER—Religious hysteria plays an important part in many of the world's theological systems. From the Shamanism of primitive cults to such elaborate religious institutions as Christianity, hysteria is an important equation in the phenomenon of faith. Most people of devout religious leaning are intensely emotional. Orthodox theology is for the most part a faith of inhibitions. For many hundreds of years it was regarded as a theological sin to be comfortable, and to be happy endangered the immortality of the soul. A creed which constantly preached "thou shalt not" and constantly limited the normal emotional expression of its followers was certain to bring a goodly number of its parishioners to a state of psycho-emotional hysteria. Imagination stimulating emotion must result in emotional crisis. Of course people rolling on the floor are not filled with the Holy Spirit, nor are they under the power of God. They are simply in an emotional spasm and have lost all semblance of self-control. These spasms are very detrimental to the bodily harmony, and a person who too frequently gives way to them will destroy emotional poise and mental balance. It is incredible that in this enlightened century the most primitive and barbaric forms of religious sorcery should still be widely practiced under the name of Christianity.

QUESTION—What is the Philosopher's Stone?

ANSWER—The alchemists of the Middle Ages, following the ancient formulas of Hermes the Egyptian, sought to accomplish the three ends of the Hermetic Art. The three goals of alchemical research were the Elixir of Life, the Philosopher's Stone, and the transmutation of metals. The Elixir of Life was the mysterious subtle essence which healed all disease and bestowed immortality. The Philosopher's Stone was the mysterious ruby-diamond or the blood-diamond, the Wise Man's Stone, which bestowed all knowledge and power and rulership over all the forces of nature. The transmutation of metals was the secret of regeneration, the

restoration of all the corrupted values of life, and security. Of course alchemy was divine chemistry, the secret of the perfection of life through the disciplines of wisdom. The Philosopher's Stone was the perfected inner life of the individual, his own diamond soul. He who perfects his own soul possesses the touchstone of the wise. The luminous soul-aura of the enlightened human being is the symbolical diamond, and he who has achieved to it lacks nothing that is necessary to wisdom and divine authority. The laboratory is life, the retort is the body of the alchemist himself, and the mysterious processes which take place within the retort represent the transmutation of the base elements of life, brought about by the living of the divine art.

QUESTION—Please tell me what books will assist me in the study of the Sacred Magic of the Kabbalah, numbers, etc., and where I can obtain them?

ANSWER—The Kabbalah has been called the Secret Doctrine of Israel, and is one of the most important sources of the Ancient Wisdom Teachings. Eliphas Levi, the French Kabbalist, wrote that the three most important books of the Kabbalah are the ZOHAR, the SEPHER YETZIRAH, and the APOCALYPSE. The ZOHAR has been recently translated into English for the first time and is published by the Soncino

Press, 5 Gower St., London, W. C. The SEPHER YETZIRAH can be ordered from any bookstore dealing in second hand occult books. Several editions exist in English. In addition to these works there are several authors who have written explaining or interpreting Kabbalistic thought. Isaac Myer, Arthur Edward Waite, Franck, Ginsberg and MacGregor Mathers have all written readable works on the subject. The great textbook of Kabbalism is the KABBALA DENUDATA published in 1677 in Latin only by Knorr von Rosenroth. This book may be consulted in the San Francisco public library, the New York City public library, and in the Library of Congress.

Books dealing with the numerology of the Kabbalah are extremely scarce. The only works I have on the subject are in manuscript. Authentic books on any phase of numerology are extremely rare and the popular available writings are of doubtful importance. Stanley's HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY has a good article on the Pythagorean theory of numbers. Thomas Taylor's THEORETIC ARITHMETIC is the most important textbook available on this subject. Wynn Westcott's NUMBERS is a small but interesting handbook. I hope at some future time to be able to publish some of the old manuscripts on numerology in our collection.

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall

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